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ENGLISH COAL INDUSTRY IN THE SEVENTEENTH
AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

IN England the mining of coal is of great antiquity.¹ Coal was in use among the Saxons, apparently, for the burning of lime and the shaping of iron.² At an early time it came into use as fuel. It is mentioned in the Newminster chartulary about 1236; and in 1306, according to the antiquarian Prynne, it was much employed by London artificers in place of charcoal and wood, and caused such intolerable smoke that the king forbade it to be used there.³ About the time of the Peasants' Revolt a chronicler speaks of coal which grows under the ground in Wales.⁴ Before this time it seems to have been exported.⁵ During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries there is much information to show that coal was mined at Newcastle and Gateshead, that it was largely used, and that considerable quantities were borne by sea to London, becoming thus the sea-coal

¹ For an admirable account, filled with antiquarian learning, and with copious references and annotations, see John Brand, *The History and Antiquities of the Town and County of the Town of Newcastle upon Tyne, including an Account of the Coal Trade of that Place*, etc. (London, 1789), II. 241-311; also Matthias Dunn, *An Historical, Geological, and Descriptive View of the Coal Trade of the North of England*, etc. (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1844); Mark Archer, *A Sketch of the History of the Coal Trade of Northumberland and Durham* (London, [1897]), pt. I.; also R. L. Galloway, *Papers relating to the History of the Coal Trade and the Invention of the Steam Engine*, etc. (London, 1906), pp. 15-24.

² Archer, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-5.

³ Surtees Society, *Publications*, LXVI. (1876) 55, 201. "Jam de novo praeter solitum ex Carbone marino concremant et componunt; de quo tantus et talis prosilit foetor intolerabilis, quod diffundens se per loca vicina, aër ibidem inficitur in immensum: . . ." William Prynne, *Brief Animadversions on . . . the Fourth Part of Coke's Institutes* (London, 1669), p. 182, quoting "'Pat. 35 Edward I. m. 4. dorso'".

⁴ Trevisa-Higden, *Polychronicon* (Rolls Series), I. 399.

⁵ Petition of Thomas Rente of Pontoise, 1325. *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, I. 433; Brand, II. 255.

of common parlance.⁶ This traffic may have been subject to customs payment for a long time, but express mention is made of it in the time of Henry V.⁷ During this and the following century there were probably numerous mines, many of them doubtless small, in the north country.⁸ Aeneas Sylvius, speaking of the wonders of Scotland, of the winter days only three hours long, and of fruits which change into birds, tells also of the wondrous stones which poorly clad beggars accept in lieu of alms, and which they joyfully burn instead of wood.⁹ A hundred years later the Venetian ambassador sends back a quaint account of the wide use of coal in industry.¹⁰ Sea-coal, stone-coal, and moor-coal are all mentioned, and the mines were sources of revenue to many a landowner and ecclesiastic.¹¹ A monopoly of sea-coals was one of the measures of James I., and was planned also in the reign following, while by this time the customs upon coal were recognized as "an ancient Revenue of the Crown".¹²

This coal was obtained in various places. There was a coal-pit eight fathoms deep in Somersetshire at the beginning of the seventeenth century.¹³ At this time there was no little activity in the Midlands, while Scottish coal is mentioned also.¹⁴ Trade was carried on from Hull, Yarmouth, and "Larpoole" in Lancashire;¹⁵ most of all, however, from the Tyne. "The greatest Part of this Kingdom, and more especially the City of London, and most Mari-

⁶ Richard Welford, *History of Newcastle and Gateshead in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (London, 1884, 1887).

⁷ *Statutes of the Realm*, II. 208; Brand, *op. cit.*, II. 270.

⁸ Welford, *loc. cit.*, I., II.

⁹ "Nam pauperes pene nudos ad templa mendicantes, acceptis lapidibus eleemosynae gratia datis, laetos abiisse conspeximus: id genus lapidis sive sulphurea sive alia pingui materia praeditum, pro ligno, quo regio nuda est, comburitur." *Aeneae Sylvii Piccolominei . . . Opera* (Basel, 1551), p. 443; Brand, *op. cit.*, II. 263.

¹⁰ "Nelle parti del Nord, che e il paese confinante colla Scozia, si ritrova certa sorta di terra quasi come miniera, e brucia come il carbone, e se ne usa da molti e massime dalli fabbri; e se non lasciasse un non so che di mal sentore, facendo gran fazione e costando poco, si userebbe ancora piu." "Relazione di Giacomo Soranzo", in Eugenio Albèri, *Relazioni dello Impero Britannico nel Secolo XVI. scritte da Veneti Ambasciatori* (Florence, 1852), pt. II., p. 50; Welford, *op. cit.*, II. 318.

¹¹ *Statutes of the Realm*, vol. IV., pt. I., p. 410; Welford, *op. cit.*, II. 83, 104, III.

¹² *Commons' Journals*, I. 685; "Many monopolies spoken of, among others, one that only 10 men may sell sea-coal throughout England" (1637). *Historical Manuscripts Commission, Tenth Report*, III. 163; *Commons' Journals*, I. 778.

¹³ Hist. MSS. Comm., *Twelfth Report*, I. 71 (Coke MSS.).

¹⁴ *Id.*, IV. 499, 500; *Fifteenth Report*, X. 156.

¹⁵ *Commons' Journals*, II. 90.

time Towns, are served and furnished with Coals from the Town of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and the adjacent Parts of Northumberland, and the Bishoprick of Durham", says a declaration of 1643.¹⁶ Somewhat earlier the author of a pamphlet declares that 200 ships carry coal from Newcastle to London, while as many more serve the other seacoast towns, great and small. "Hither even to the Mines mouth, come all our Neighbour countrey Nations with their Shippes continually." French ships came in fleets of forty or fifty sail, serving the ports of northern France, and others from Germany and Holland carried on the trade with Flanders and beyond.¹⁷ "An other Commodity that this River bringeth forth, is Coale in great abundance; most of the People that liveth in these parts, lives by the benefit of Coales, and are carried out of this River into most parts of England South-Ward, into Germany, and other transmarine Countries."¹⁸ And a rhymester bursting forth in exultant doggerel cries:¹⁹

"England's a perfect World! has Indies too!
Correct your Maps: New-Castle is Peru."

The protection of this sea trade, and particularly the uninterrupted transport of coals to London, was a matter of great solicitude to the authorities. A navy paper of 1629, endorsed by Sir J. Coke, "Proposition for a fleet of 5 squadrons", assigns one of them to guard "the Coal Fleets of Newcastle".²⁰ In 1640 there were apprehensions that the trade might be interrupted by the Scots; and two years later Parliament, narrating things done by the king's evil counsellors, spoke of their fortifying the mouth of the Tyne, so that all the Newcastle coal traffic could be stopped whenever his Majesty pleased, which would bring great burden and distress to the city of London and many parts of the kingdom.²¹ After the Restoration, whenever there was danger from abroad, hundreds of colliers sailed together under the convoy of war-ships, and numerous communications about their movements were sent to the commissioners of the navy and the clerk of the privy council.²²

¹⁶ *Lords' Journals*, VI. 82.

¹⁷ *The Trades Increase* (London, 1615), pp. 10, 11; also Hist. MSS. Comm., *Eleventh Report*, VII. 291..

¹⁸ William Grey, *Chorographia; or, a Survey of Newcastle upon Tyne* (1649, ed. Newcastle, 1818), p. 32.

¹⁹ *News from Newcastle* (London, 1651), p. 1.

²⁰ Hist. MSS. Comm., *Twelfth Report*, I. 379 (Coke MSS.).

²¹ *Hardwicke State Papers*, II. 173; *Parliamentary History*, II. 1411.

²² "Yesterday the Flyeing Grayhounds sayled from this porte [Newcastle] in the Companie of the Convoy and neere 400 sayle of Colliers". State Papers

During the seventeenth century coal was more and more used in various manufactures, and by the end of the century it had become indispensable. "Iron may be made with Sea-coal, and Pit-coal", says a speaker in 1614.²³ A little later coal was to be used in the making of tobacco pipes.²⁴ In 1690 the brewers of London were suffering in their trade because of the high price of coals.²⁵ Two years after, the attorney-general reported in favor of the incorporation of a company to smelt iron with pit-coal.²⁶ In 1696 the glass-workers of Southwark petitioned that a duty might be removed, lest their manufacture be ruined, and the woolen-dyers of London declared that "they cannot carry on their Trade without great Quantities of Coals".²⁷ It was employed likewise in the manufacture of salt.²⁸ Many trades made use of it as time went on. In 1731 a petition of brewers, distillers, dyers, glass-makers, smiths, and sugar-bakers, had to do with the use of coal.²⁹ Shortly after, a petition against its high cost came from these same, together with soap-boilers, "and other considerable Consumers".³⁰ In 1739 high prices occasioned protest from brewers, brick-makers, calico-printers, distillers, dyers, founders, glass-makers, lime-burners, smiths, soap-boilers, and sugar-bakers, "who are Consumers of large Quantities of Coals".³¹

A great part of it was used for fuel. In 1641 payment is made by the corporation of Bridgnorth "To Humfrey Parkes for halfe a tonne of coales for a great fire that watch night which was made nere the Cross in the high streete of this Town".³² "Winter draws on and never was less provision of coals here than now; 'tis likely many a house will be pulled down and burnt for want of firing", writes a correspondent from Dublin in 1643.³³ In 1662 arrangement is made for the purchase of £500 worth of sea-coal for the king's garrison at Tangier.³⁴ Above all it was so used in London.

Domestic, Charles II., CLXVIII., Aug. 25, 1666. See *id.*, CCCV., Apr. 13, 1672; CCCXII., June 24, 1672; and CCCXIII., CCCXIV., *passim*. "This day wee have news of 14 Colliers being taken by three dutch Capers aft of Hornesey". *Id.*, CCCXXXVI., pt. I., June 13, 1673.

²³ *Commons' Journals*, I. 480.

²⁴ Hist. MSS. Comm., *Fourteenth Report*, II. 69 (Portland MSS.).

²⁵ *Commons' Journals*, X. 491.

²⁶ *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1691-1692*, pp. 518, 523, 524.

²⁷ *Commons' Journals*, XI. 391, 394.

²⁸ *Id.*, XII. 587.

²⁹ *Id.*, XXI. 739, 740.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

³¹ *Id.*, XXIII. 263.

³² Hist. MSS. Comm., *Tenth Report*, IV. 434.

³³ *Id.*, *Thirteenth Report*, I. 133 (Portland MSS.).

³⁴ Privy Council Register, LVI., Aug. 16, 1662.

At the beginning of the Civil War, Parliament commanded the lord mayor to ascertain, "What Quantities of Coals are in and about the City of London, and for what Time the Store will continue; and to consider what moderate Price and Rate may be set upon the Coals that are now in Store, in Consideration of the Poor".³⁵ In the following year, when trade with Newcastle was stopped, "all the poore in the City . . . are fearfull they must sit and blow their nailes the rest of this Winter for cold, unlesse some new project . . . be found out, to make the Bricks and balls of Clay burne."³⁶ "All the morning in the cellar with the colliers, removing the coles out of the old cole hole into the new one", writes Pepys in 1662; and during the war with Holland he notes the great misery the city and kingdom are like to suffer soon, with the Dutch in command of the sea, and able to burn the ships at Newcastle.³⁷

Lowering the price of coals, or affording a substitute, engaged the attention of charlatans and statesmen; and during the South Sea period one of the projects was "A Subscription of £1,000,000 for a Joint Stock, to be employed in carrying on the Navigation and Traffick of Coals from Newcastle to London".³⁸ Huge quantities were brought down the coast. In 1690 an investigation showed that during the two past years 650,000 chaldrons had been conveyed to London.³⁹ About 1704, 400,000 chaldrons were entered from Newcastle, and for some time this seems to have been the amount imported annually.⁴⁰ About 1730 a writer declares, "There are above a Thousand Sail of Ships constantly imployed in Carrying Coals to the different Parts of England, Ireland, Spain, Portugal, Germany, France, Flanders, and Holland; and the Market at Lon-

³⁵ *Commons' Journals*, II. 905.

³⁶ *Sea-Coale, Char-Coale, and Small-Coale: or a Discourse betweene a Newcastle Collier, a Small-Coale-Man, and a Collier of Croydon: concerning the Prohibition of Trade with New-Castle, and the Fearfull Complaint of the Poore of the Citie of London, for the Inhancing the Price of Sea-Coales* (London, 1643), p. 4.

³⁷ *Diary*, Feb. 8, 1661/2, June 23, 1667.

³⁸ Broadside, "Expedients proposed for the easing and advantaging the Coal-trade, and lessening the price of Coles in London and other places", St. P. Dom., Charles II., CCCLXXIV. 107; *Good News for the Poor, or an Expedient Humbly Offered for Supplying the Want and Bringing Down the Price of Coles: Discovering a New Invention for Maintaining good Fires at an easie Charge, notwithstanding the present War, or any the like Exigency*, etc. (London, 1674); *Commons' Journals*, XIX. 341.

³⁹ Hist. MSS. Comm., *Thirteenth Report*, V. 26 (House of Lords MSS.). The content of a chaldron was different at different times: 42 cwt. before 1678; 52½ cwt., 1678-1695; 53 cwt. from 1696. See Surtees Society. *Publications*, CV. 260.

⁴⁰ St. P. Dom., Anne, IV., May 18, 1704; *Commons' Journals*, XXI. 370, 517.

don is the Standard, and settles the Price, for the most Part, for all other Markets.”⁴¹ By the middle of the century 500,000 chaldrons of coal were imported into London annually, most of which was used in the trades.⁴² Lesser quantities were consumed in other places. In 1696 the officials of Norfolk declared that the fuel of their county was almost entirely coal.⁴³ There was a considerable trade from the pits to inland towns. Many thousand families got their living by transporting it in wagons over the roads in good weather. This coal was said to be less good than the sea-coal brought to London.⁴⁴

Thus it may be seen that mining and the coal trade had become important industries at this time. “Many . . . are employed in this trade of Coales;” says a seventeenth-century writer, “many live by working of them in the Pits; many live by conveying them in Wagons and Waines to the River Tine; many men are employed in conveying the Coals in Keels from the Stathes aboard the Ships.”⁴⁵ And another, writing later, says that there were employed in his time 1200 ships with 15,000 men to navigate them, and that on land 100,000 persons were engaged above the ground and under it.⁴⁶ In these industries the government had unusual and growing interest. Constantly increasing duties were levied, which, though they were difficult to collect, were a noticeable item in public revenue, and helped to rebuild St. Paul’s and repair Westminster Abbey.⁴⁷ The shipping of coals along the coast was always considered important in the interests of the navy. “Plantations, the Fishery, and Coal trade, are the three great nurseries of seamen”, said Sir George Downing.⁴⁸ In 1696 a petition stated that “the Coal-Trade . . . now is the chiefest Nursery for Seamen”, and the same thing was said half a century later.⁴⁹ Charles Povey asserted that to his certain knowledge the colliery trade bred up more mariners than all of England’s commerce with other countries.⁵⁰ In addition to the fact that the

⁴¹ *The Case of the Owners and Masters of Ships Employed in the Coal-Trade* (1730?); also *Commons’ Journals*, XXI. 516, where it is stated that 400 ships were engaged in the London trade.

⁴² *Considerations on the Coal Trade*, etc. (1748 ?).

⁴³ *Commons’ Journals*, XI. 421.

⁴⁴ *Reasons Humbly Offered; to shew, that a Duty upon In-land Coals, will be no Advantage to His Majesty, but a great Grievance to his Subjects* (n. p., n. d.).

⁴⁵ Grey, *Chorographia*, p. 34.

⁴⁶ *The Case of the Owners of Ships concerned in the Coal-Trade*, etc. (n. p., n. d.).

⁴⁷ St. P. Dom., Charles II., CCCCXII. 97; Additional MSS. 30504.

⁴⁸ In 1675. Grey, *Debates*, III. 333.

⁴⁹ *Commons’ Journals*, XI. 382, XXI. 465.

⁵⁰ Charles Povey, *The Unhappiness of England, as to its Trade by Sea and Land, Truly Stated* (London, 1701), p. 4.

government had for its own sake great interest in the maintenance of the trade, whenever anything interfered with the obtaining or distribution of the commodity the authorities were assailed with such insistent and vociferous complaints, that they were never willing to tolerate interference of any kind.

The assistance of the government was usually invoked to reduce exorbitant prices. There was constant tendency for the cost to increase to consumers along with a rise in other prices, and also for reasons to be discussed below. In 1690 complaint was made that the high price of coals was harming London manufacturers and making the poor suffer for want of firing.⁵¹ In 1702 a committee investigated the cause of excessive prices then prevailing, and there were many complaints and attempted remedies as time went on.⁵² This dearness was due among other things to the duties levied upon coal both at the port of departure and at the port where it was unloaded again, but it must be explained largely as a result of restraint of trade arising from numerous devices practised by both employers and employes, where the coal was produced and where it was finally sold for consumption.

As regards the capitalists in places where the coal was obtained, it may be said at once that power tended always to get into the hands of those who controlled transportation. But whereas in the nineteenth century mastery in many places fell to those who directed the railroads, in England in the eighteenth century control of the coal trade came into the possession not of the ship-owners, but of those who held terminal facilities, such as way-leaves and wharf rights. Here the typical instance is the powerful organization of the hostmen of Newcastle.

In the north of England, as elsewhere during the Middle Ages, the hostlers or hostmen were free inhabitant householders, to whom was assigned the entertaining of merchant strangers, with responsibility for their conduct, and who had among other privileges the right to sell such supplies as were not monopolized by the local trading gilds. At Newcastle the vend of coal and grindstones came into their hands, and by 1600 they had obtained as the result of long custom a practical monopoly. In return for an increased duty upon coal exported, Elizabeth incorporated their company, and confirmed ambiguously the privileges which they alleged to be theirs; after which, vigorous action and able management upheld, for a long time, what they affirmed to be their right.⁵³ A statute of

⁵¹ *Commons' Journals*, X. 491.

⁵² *Id.*, XIV. 19.

⁵³ F. W. Dendy, *Extracts from the Records of the Company of Hostmen of*

Tudor times making Newcastle the emporium of this district rendered it easier for the hostmen to obtain a monopoly.⁵⁴ Except for a brief period, they maintained intact their exclusive privileges throughout the seventeenth century and for a while in the century following, until rising sentiment in favor of free trade in towns gradually broke it down.⁵⁵

Having established firmly their monopoly of selling at Newcastle, they began to reach out for the ownership or the control of the coal mines nearby. In 1638 an owner near Newcastle, seeking to obtain from the king permission to sell certain mines, declared that no one could make a gain by them save the free hostmen.⁵⁶ During the period of the Protectorate they were vigorously and almost successfully assailed by independent interests through an able pamphleteer, in whose denunciations as well as in their own records their methods of procedure are revealed.⁵⁷ According to this writer, they are

Ingrossers of all Coals, and other commodities, into their own hands, from the Inheritors . . . with other irresistable Oppressions, like to the Spanish Inquisition . . . And what they cannot do by force of their Charter amongst themselves, against any private person opposing, then by Combination ruin them at Law, by their Delatory Plea, and out-pursing them, to the high dishonor of God. . . . They will not suffer any of the Coal Owners in any of the two Counties to sell their own Coals, but the Owners must either sel their Coals to the free Hoast-men, at what price they please, and then all ships must give them their own price, or get none. This it is which makes coals so dear: they either hoard or sell at excessive rates, and so reduce the people to miserable condition.⁵⁸

The ownership of the neighboring coal-mines had by the beginning of the seventeenth century come largely into the hands of the hostmen. Owners who were not of this society labored under great disadvantage in getting their coal to market and disposing of it. Sometimes it was a matter of much difficulty and expense to make possible the transportation of coal from colliery to river front. In 1732 a traveller notes the pains which had been taken to prepare a way from the Blackburn mine, seven miles from Newcastle, and the huge arch built over a small stream, to make the proper incline all *Newcastle-upon-Tyne* (Surtees Society, CV., 1901). The author's admirable introduction is the principal authority upon the subject.

⁵⁴ 21 Henry VIII. c. 18; Dendy, *op. cit.*, pp. xxx, xxxi.

⁵⁵ Dendy, *op. cit.*, pp. xxxiii-xxxvi.

⁵⁶ Welford, *op. cit.*, III. 343.

⁵⁷ Ralph Gardiner, *Englands Grievance Discovered, in relation to the Coal-Trade*, etc. (London, 1655).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, introduction, and p. 64.

the way.⁵⁹ Even when there were no natural obstacles, it was often necessary to pay exorbitant prices to obtain right of way. "Another thing that is remarkable is their way-leaves," says Roger North, "for when men have pieces of ground between the colliery and the river, they sell leave to lead coals over their ground; and so dear that the owner of a rood of ground will expect £20 per annum for this leave."⁶⁰ In 1739 a pamphleteer inveighed against the abuses connected with this. He declared that the value of the land over which many of the ways were constructed did not exceed twenty shillings an acre, and some of it was not worth two.⁶¹ At Wickham Moor a rent of £3000 per annum was for a long while paid. He thought it extraordinary that a single acre of land should sometimes, because of its lucky situation, be of more value than three or four hundred acres of better land nearby, with a coal mine besides. Twenty-five years' purchase was the ordinary price of land, but twenty-five thousand years' value for an annual rent was a monstrous thing. He proposed that the public authorities purchase the way-leaves at a fair valuation, and that ways be constructed where necessary, after which all coal-owners should be admitted to use them on payment of a proper share of the cost.⁶²

The monopolists first obtained such mines as they wished, and then strove to crush out all competition. Many collieries they leased from the proprietors; elsewhere they paid the possessors an annual consideration to let their mines lie unwrought.⁶³ By various means owners were harassed in their business. A statement printed about 1740 recounts two instances where several devices were employed to prevent the working of mines, which ended at last with their being flooded.⁶⁴ It was at this time that a statute was passed against the drowning of mines, directed against those

⁵⁹ *Diary of a Tour in 1732 through Parts of England, Wales, Ireland and Scotland, made by John Loveday of Caversham* (Roxburghe Club, CVII., 1890). p. 172.

⁶⁰ North, *Lives of the Norths* (ed. Jessopp, London, 1890), I. 176.

⁶¹ "There is a small Common, not exceeding three hundred Yards over; the Herbage of the whole Common is not, nor ever was, worth 20s. *per Annum*. For Leave of a Way over this small Pittance of Ground, otherwise almost useless, the late Mr. C—, as I am credibly informed, received annually, for some Years, above 2500 *l*. Impositions of the like Nature, though, perhaps, not altogether so prodigious, are frequent, and scarce a Colliery is free from them." *An Enquiry into the Reasons of the Advance of the Price of Coals, etc.* (London, 1739), pp. 17, 18.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 22, 23, 24.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁶⁴ *The Case of One of the Petitioners* (n. p., n. d.).

who wished to establish a monopoly.⁶⁵ Above all, they secured the way-leaves, for which in many instances they paid dead rents, not to use them, but to exclude others from them, so that proprietors must either let their mines be idle, or lease them on the terms offered. "The aforesaid Gentlemen having, by these Methods, secured to themselves little less than an absolute Monopoly of all Coals about Newcastle, they soon found it in their Power to enhance the Price."⁶⁶

In course of time it was found that possession of the mines was less important than control of terminal facilities and rights of way. The result of this was that gradually within the society of hostmen the fitters, who had originally been apprentices or agents for unfree owners, became more important than the hostmen who were owners; and the composition of the company was at length changed altogether from a fraternity of coal-owners to a fraternity of privileged fitters or agents, whose business it was to deliver coal from the colliery stathes or wharfs to the ships in which it was exported.⁶⁷ In the prosecution of their plans, besides employing the devices already mentioned, they got possession of so large a share of the lands adjoining the Tyne and the Wear that they almost totally debarred other persons from access to them.⁶⁸ Moreover, the fitters not only owned the keels, or small boats in which the coal was taken

⁶⁵ "Whereas of late divers evil-disposed persons possessed of or interested in collieries, have by secret and subtil devices wilfully and maliciously attempted to drown adjacent collieries, and have by means of water conveyed or obstructed for that purpose destroyed or damaged the same, intending thereby to enhance the price of coals, and gain the monopoly thereof", culprits were to pay treble damages and full costs of the suit. 13 George II. c. 21.

⁶⁶ *An Enquiry into the Reasons*, etc., pp. 13, 14.

⁶⁷ Dendy, *op. cit.*, p. xlviii. "The Hostmen or Fitters at Newcastle are an incorporated Company; their Business is to load Ships with Coals, which they carry from the Coal Owners Staiths or Wharfs, on board the Ships in Keels; these Keels are a kind of Lighters, and always carry eight Newcastle Chaldrons each." *An Enquiry into the Reasons*, etc., p. 31. By 1703 the process was already marked. "There are at Newcastle upon Tyne Men called Hoastmen or Fitters . . . it is now become a practice of these Hoastmen to buy Coales at certain prices of the owner of Colliery's and to carry them in Keels and Sell them to the Ship Masters, and Sometimes they are paid at certain Rates for their Negotiation between the Owners of the Adjacent Collieries, and the Ship Masters . . . they (and they only) now Act between the Colliery Ownrs and the Ship Masters and will Suffer none so to Act but themselves, nor any ownr of a Colliery to Act without them, for they pretend that no person but one of them (altho' an Ownr of a Colliery) can carry his Coales in Boats and Sell them directly to a Ship Mr, so that all the Coale Trade at Newcastle must come thro' the hands of these Hoastmen as they pretend." Opinion of Edward Northey, attorney-general. *Surtees Society*, CV. 162.

⁶⁸ *An Enquiry into the Reasons*, etc., p. 13.

to the ships, but they became part owners of the ships, and then agreed among themselves that no fitter should load a ship in which another fitter owned even a small share.⁶⁹ Next they strove by combination and agreement not only to regulate prices but to limit the output.⁷⁰ The result of all this was rising prices and constant complaint and discontent.

In 1704, because of a combination at Newcastle to keep up the price of coal, the queen in council commanded the secretary of state to write, "That Her Maty. disapproves all sorts of Combinations of the like Nature".⁷¹ Later in the year a committee of the council investigating the increase of price could learn of no combination of merchants at Yarmouth, and doubted whether a combination of colliery owners at Newcastle had enhanced the price, but asserted that "the Masters of Ships and the Fitters or Hoastmen Perplex the Trade by all the Artifices they can".⁷² In 1711 a bill was presented in the Commons to dissolve present and prevent future "Combinations of Coal-owners, Lightermen, Masters of Ships, and others, to advance the Price of Coals"; and the law which was passed imposed penalties upon the owners, the fitters, and the ship-owners who entered into such contracts.⁷³ In 1739, however, a petition of numerous manufacturers of London alleged that all the old abuses still brought them grievance.⁷⁴ A writer, who was apparently the champion of the complainants, asserted that the monopoly was now so thoroughly established as almost to defy opposition; that the mine-owners were not now at greater expense in digging and carrying coals than previously, but that the payment of dead rents increased the expense; that the total cost of coal delivered on shipboard was not more than 7s. 6d. per chaldron; that it might be sold at fair profit for 9s. 6d., and was sold for foreign trade at 9s. By selling it for 13s. 6d. monopolists made a profit

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-34.

⁷⁰ Dendy, *op. cit.*, pp. xliii-xlvi.

⁷¹ Privy Council Register, LXXX., May 25, 1704.

⁷² *Id.*, Sept. 5, 1704.

⁷³ *Commons' Journals*, XVI. 553; 9 Anne c. 30.

⁷⁴ "That the Price of Coals at Newcastle, and other Places in the North, hath, of late, been greatly advanced; which, the Petitioners apprehend, is owing to paying Rents for Collieries not wrought; to Wharves or Staiths being engrossed by a few; and by other Persons being prevented from bringing Coals to, and using the same; by giving less Measure of Coals at Newcastle than heretofore; and by reason many Persons are discouraged from working their Coal Mines, for want of convenient Ways or Roads to the Staiths, which they are refused or prevented from using, renting, procuring, or having, by Methods which tend to monopolize the same, as well as the Coal Trade." *Commons' Journals*, XXIII. 263.

of more than sixty-five per cent.; and thus an added burden of £83,500 a year was placed upon the kingdom. This profit went to a very few men: not to the dealers in London, nor the ship-owners, nor the miners, nor those who sold materials or sunk the mines; but to the monopolists—in so far as it did not go for way-leaves, dead rents, and lawsuits. The government should dissolve such combinations, and forbid those devices which had been employed.⁷⁵

The maintenance of the monopoly depended also on controlling the ship-owners. This was done partly by acquiring an interest in the ships, and partly by making agreements with their masters. The lot of these masters was not a happy one, for, as will presently be shown, they merely carried the coal from the monopoly where it was produced to another monopoly where it was sold. In 1701 a writer estimated that they received less than half of what would have been the fair charge for freightage, and that the coal shipping was threatened with ruin.⁷⁶ "I have been frequently surprised", he declares, "in seeing a Fleet of one or two hundred Sail arrive in the River, and the Masters sell their Coals at so low a Rate, that they have actually lost ten or fifteen Pounds in their Freight"; and he says that the masters then tried to grind down the wages of those who unloaded their vessels.⁷⁷

The laborers, that is to say, the miners who dug the coal, and the keelmen who carried it from the wharves to the ships, present another aspect of the subject. Of the miners at this time there is little to be said, for accounts of them are scanty and few. Probably they belonged to the lowest class of the population: in Scotland they remained villeins attached to the soil until the end of the eighteenth century. In the north of England they were hired for the year, during which they were bound for certain wages, as had been the case since the days of the Statute of Laborers.⁷⁸ In 1739 George Whitefield preached to the savage colliers near Bristol,⁷⁹

⁷⁵ *An Enquiry into the Reasons*, etc., pp. 8-10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 28-31. This attack was directed rather against the mine-owners than the fitters.

⁷⁶ Coals were sold at London for about 18s. per chaldron; the masters purchased them for about 6s. at Newcastle, and paid 15d. for various charges there; to which must be added 5s. customs to the king, 1s. 6d. for the rebuilding of St. Paul's, 1s. 6d. metage, and certain charges to laborers, making more than 8s.; so that masters had no more than 3s. for themselves; whereas 6s. in summer and 9s. in winter would have been a fair compensation. Charles Povey, *The Unhappiness of England*, etc., pp. 11, 12.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10. In 1702, however, the masters had complained of the high wages which they then had to pay. *Commons' Journals*, XIV. 19.

⁷⁸ R. N. Boyd, *Coal Pits and Pitmen, a Short History of the Coal Trade and the Legislation Affecting It* (London, 1892), p. 3.

⁷⁹ When Whitefield spoke of going forth to convert savages, friends in

and about the middle of the eighteenth century a philosophic writer pitied the miserable condition of all miners.⁸⁰ Nearly all of their labor was done by hand. The coal-hewers worked in stagnant atmosphere and amidst poisonous gases with ever present danger of explosions, though many of the mines as yet were carried to no great depth.⁸¹ Drainage was poor until Newcomen's steam engine came generally into use about 1720. The coal was drawn along miry passages in corves or baskets, or later in cars, and was raised up the shafts by horse machines or gins, or by hand-windlasses, and sometimes was carried up ladders. From the mines to the wharves the coal was drawn over rude wooden ways in ruder wagons, cast-iron railways appearing in the latter half of the century. In the north of England a coal-hewer received 1s. 6d. or more a day. Some women worked in the mines, and around the pit mouths and the stathes a great part of the labor was performed by them. They cleaned the coal, and barrowed it from the stathes to the keels, receiving for such work a penny or a penny and a half a ton. The toil was brutalizing, and the hours were probably long.⁸²

Apparently there are instances of rudimentary organization among the miners, but not enough to ameliorate their condition. Remedy they sought by violence and uprising. In 1738 there was a riot of coal-miners at Bristol, in which they attempted to stop all supplies of coal from coming to the city whether by sea or land, and in the midst of much violence levied contributions from passers-by for their support.⁸³ In 1754 there was another riot among them.⁸⁴ Two years later, in a season of backward harvests, when

Bristol said to him: "What need of going abroad for this? Have we not Indians enough at home? If you have a mind to convert Indians, there are colliers enough in Kingswood." Robert Southey, *Life of Wesley*, etc. (third ed., London, 1846), I. 197.

⁸⁰ "I suppose that there are in Great Britain upwards of an hundred thousand People employed in Lead, Tin, Iron, Copper, and Coal Mines; these unhappy Wretches scarce ever see the Light of the Sun; they are buried in the Bowels of the Earth; there they work at a severe and dismal Task, without the least Prospect of being delivered from it; they subsist upon the coarsest and worst sort of Fare; they have their Health miserably impaired, and their Lives cut short, by being perpetually confined in the close Vapour of these malignant Minerals." [Edmund Burke?], *A Vindication of Natural Society*, etc. (London, 1756), pp. 90, 91.

⁸¹ But in 1688 Sir Thomas Lowther writes: "In the morning the steward of my Colepitts fell downe the Pitt 34 yards deep . . . yet by God's mercie was not killed." Hist. MSS. Comm., *Thirteenth Report*, VII. 96 (Lonsdale MSS.).

⁸² The best account which I have noticed is in Matthias Dunn, *View of the Coal Trade*, etc., pp. 39-44; also Boyd, *Coal Pits and Pitmen*, p. 14.

⁸³ St. P. Dom., Entry Books, CXXXI., Oct. 9, 11, 13, 1738.

⁸⁴ St. P. Dom., George II., CXXV., Jan. 17, 1754.

the farmers kept for their own work the wagons in which the coal was hauled to market, coal masters of the Midlands stopped work at the mines, or turned off great numbers of men. Then the miners gathered together at Coventry, at Nuneaton, and also at Nottingham, and terrified the local authorities in an effort to reduce the price of food.⁸⁵ Their clannishness and their willingness to act together made it difficult to deal with them;⁸⁶ and in some places they had a measure of political importance.⁸⁷ The severe penalties imposed upon persons who drowned or set fire to coal-mines would seem to bear witness to numerous outrages committed against such property by the discontented; and repeated legislation suggests the continuance of the evil and the difficulty of stamping it out.⁸⁸

More picturesque and better known are the keelmen of Newcastle, who carried the coal in wherries or keels from the wharves to the ships. The keelmen with their distinctive habits and dress, long a feature of life by the Tyne, were largely Scots and borderers. They had a fellowship at the beginning of the sixteenth century, which became well known in later times.⁸⁹ A church and a school were provided for them by the corporation, and at the beginning of the eighteenth century they agreed that regular deductions be made from their wages for the erection of a hospital and the maintaining of charities among them.⁹⁰ At this time they numbered about 1600.⁹¹ These keelmen were not only well organized in their asso-

⁸⁵ St. P. Dom., George II., CXXXV., Aug. 25, 30, 1756.

⁸⁶ "I need not observe, that the Circumstances of Colliers are very different to any other Men; not only as they all act in League, and would stand by one another, throughout the Kingdom, and are desperate Fellows (which is seen by their attacking Gaols to release any that are confined,) but besides this they think they can, at any time, hide themselves, and they know that the Kingdom cannot do without Coals, and they know that other People cannot do their Work." Report, *ibid.*, Aug. 30, 1756.

⁸⁷ "These Colliers are always let loose to support the Freedom of Elections, and therefore now all the Party are desirous to have the Colliers now in prison rescued." The mayor of Nottingham, *id.*, Sept. 7, 1756.

⁸⁸ 10 George II. c. 32; 17 George II. c. 40; 24 George II. c. 57; 31 George II. c. 42.

⁸⁹ Dendy, *op. cit.*, pp. 1, li.

⁹⁰ "It has been already represented, that the Poor Keel-men have raised a voluntary Contribution of Charity, spared out of their Daily Labour, in order to Maintain and Support their own Poor; and that themselves, when by Age or Accidents, to which their hazardous Employment is very much exposed, are past their Labour, may not perish thro' Want, and be miserably Starved." *A Farther Case Relating to the Poor Keel-men of Newcastle* (n. p., n. d.).

⁹¹ *The Case of the Poor Skippers and Keel-men of New-Castle, Truly Stated*, etc. (n. p., n. d.), p. 1; *The Case of . . . great Numbers of the Trading Hoast-men, commonly called Fitters, . . . of New-Castle upon Tyne* (n. p., n. d.); Dendy, p. lii.

ciation, but were hardy and vigorous, and fully alive to the opportunities which they had to interrupt the coal trade when they desired to express their dissatisfaction. Accordingly there were numerous disturbances.

In 1671 there was "a Riott at New Castle", when the keelmen assembled to disturb the peace and interrupt trade, so that the privy council ordered the leaders to be imprisoned until the next assizes.⁹² In 1710 there was a grave disturbance as a result of which coal trade on the Tyne was brought to a stop. The civil magistrates were entirely unable to cope with the situation, until the arrival of troops made it possible to force the strikers back to their work.⁹³ The queen in council considered a petition "from the poor Keelmen and others concerned in the Coal Works", and ordered an investigation.⁹⁴ The mayor of Newcastle wrote:

We have examined and considered some of their Complaints which relate to their Wages w^{ch} they wou'd have encreased beyond what has been paid them these thirty years—With severall extravagant demands not in our power to grant them. We have given them undr. our hands that they shall have their just and usual Wages and all other reasonable demands soe far as it is in our power to grant yet this will not prevail with them to goe to work.⁹⁵

The queen commanded the magistrates to "Consider of the Causes and occasions of the uneasiness and discontent of the Keelmen there, and endeavour to find out some expedient for satisfying the Minds of those People"; and appointed a committee of the council to examine the affair, "as this matter of the Coals is of so publick a Concern". The result was a settlement, in which apparently concessions were made on both sides.⁹⁶

In 1719 trouble broke out afresh, so serious that it seemed to the local authorities almost a rebellion. The strikers demanded an increase of wages to 3s. per keel.⁹⁷ This was refused as more than the trade could bear, whereupon navigation upon the Tyne and the Wear was completely stopped. Not only did they refuse to work, but they would not let the fitters make use of the keels. Persuasion was tried, the riot act was read, and presently some of the leaders

⁹² Privy Council Register, LXIII., June 9, 1671; Hist. MSS. Comm., *Twelfth Report*, VII. 79 (Le Fleming MSS.).

⁹³ St. P. Dom., Entry Books, CIX., June 17, 27, July 1, 1710; St. P. Dom., Anne, XII., June 23, July 21, 1710.

⁹⁴ Privy Council Register, LXXXIII., June 15, 1710.

⁹⁵ St. P. Dom., Anne, XII., July 11, 1710.

⁹⁶ St. P. Dom., Entry Books, CIX., July 4, Aug. 1, 1710.

⁹⁷ Apparently the keel contained at this time six chaldrons. St. P. Dom., Regencies, LXI., June 5, 1719. Earlier it was supposed to contain ten. Surtees Society, CV. 44.

were seized and thrust into prison, whereupon great numbers of their comrades assembled in threatening mien. In answer to appeals from the local officials the lords justices of the regency caused a regiment and two tenders to be dispatched. After attempts had been made to reach an agreement, the keelmen, with their leaders in prison and themselves reduced to destitution, submitted.⁹⁸ They complained that the fitters had put more work upon them than was usual, and had obliged them to receive part of their wages in truck. This the magistrates denied.⁹⁹ Proceedings were begun against the strikers for restraining trade and for refusing to allow others to work,¹⁰⁰ and because, after contracting to work at certain wages for a year, they had insisted upon more,¹⁰¹ and also because they had entered into a combination. Prosecution, against all but a school-master who had urged the keelmen to rise, was finally stayed, when they made entire submission and expressed their sorrow.¹⁰²

In 1738 there was disturbance again, and again military aid was asked for.¹⁰³ There was trouble or threatened trouble on several occasions after this.¹⁰⁴ In 1746 the mayor of Newcastle declared that the keelmen "are too ready to rise and become tumultuous upon the least pretence".¹⁰⁵

The experience of the keelmen, as well as that of the weavers and the tailors at this time, shows that the attitude of the authorities toward workmen was, that they must not combine in clubs or associations, as the rudimentary trade unions were called; that they must

⁹⁸ St. P. Dom., Regencies, LVII., May 15, 16, 17, 1719; LXI., May 19, 21, June 4, 5, 9, 16, 1719; LXII., May 30, 1719.

⁹⁹ St. P. Dom., Entry Books, CCLXXXI., June 16, 1719; St. P. Dom., Regencies, LXI., June 4, 1719.

¹⁰⁰ It "had given an Interruption of several Weeks to the Coal Trade and the Consequence would have been severely felt at London if it had continued", Delafaye to Stanhope, St. P. Dom., Regencies, LXI., June 9, 1719.

¹⁰¹ "They will not go to work in their Keells without a great increase of their Wages, altho they have bound themselves to the Fitters . . . for certain Wages for a Year ending at Christmas next, which are duely paid them." Letter of the magistrates of Newcastle, *id.*, LVII., May 16, 1719.

¹⁰² St. P. Dom., Entry Books, CCLXXXI., July 23, 1719.

¹⁰³ "Our Keelmen . . . on pretence of some grievencys have refused to go to work for a few days past and assembled every Night in great Numbers keeping Watch, to deter and hinder those of the well disposed among them, from Navigating their Keels to the entire stoppage of the Coal Trade on the River Tyne." They have been urged to return to their duty, and some seem willing, "but express their fear of being ill treated and hindered by others of their own Fraternity". The mayor and magistrates of Newcastle to the secretary of state. *Id.*, CXXX., May 16, 1738.

¹⁰⁴ *Gentleman's Magazine*, X. (1740) 355; Brand, *op. cit.*, II. 520; St. P. Dom., George II., LXXXIII., Apr. 17, 1746, CXII., Apr. 30, 1750.

¹⁰⁵ St. P. Dom., George II., LXXXIII., Apr. 21, 1746.

not assemble together for the purpose of altering their wages or bettering their condition; that assembling for such purposes would be regarded as unlawful, and disorder accompanying it would be dealt with as riot. This was not merely because the government represented capitalists and the upper classes, but also because the authorities continued as in the past their attempts to supervise industry and regulate wages. If the justices of the peace tried to enforce wages which they had assessed or which the workmen had contracted for during a certain period, and if the central and the local authorities alike frowned upon the strike and the meeting together of workmen, and often compelled them to go back to work, it is also true that the government strove to regulate the prices fixed by capitalists and to break up their combinations also. That its success was greater with respect to laborers than employers was noticed by a contemporary: "We have many laws, Sir", he said, "for preventing combinations amongst poor workmen, but few, if any, for preventing combinations amongst the rich masters that employ them: the one I take to be as necessary as the other."¹⁰⁶

A study of the coal industry during this period in connection with the importation and distribution of the commodity reveals the same story of combination, attempted monopoly, enhancement of prices, and oppressed and discontented labor. As Newcastle was the centre of the industry at the one end, so was London at the other. From London, as from other places, came constant complaints of the exorbitant and increasing cost of coal. "Nay, I doe intend, neighbour *Sea-coale* . . . and so does all the poore of the Citie, to petition that a constant rate may be set upon you", says a pamphlet of 1643.¹⁰⁷ The trouble was owing to the number of successive exchanges involved in getting the coal to the consumer,¹⁰⁸ but it was moreover due to the increasing duties imposed, and to the monopoly which the woodmongers or importers were attempting to establish in London.

Customs on coal were increased as the exigencies of the government became greater. Elizabeth imposed a shilling duty on each chaldron exported from Newcastle for English consumption at the

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Whichcot, in the House of Commons, Mar. 26, 1753. *Parliamentary History*, XIV. 1312.

¹⁰⁷ *Sea-Coale, Char-Coale, and Small-Coale*, etc., p. 8.

¹⁰⁸ "A Welch Pedigree, doth not descend by more steps and degrees, than the propriety of their Coals is varied . . . The Owners of Collieries, must first sell the Coals to the Magistrates of Newcastle, the Magistrates to the Masters of ships, the Master of ships to the Woodmongers or Wharfingers, and they to those that spend them." Gardiner, *Englands Grievance Discovered*, p. 201.

time when she incorporated the hostmen.¹⁰⁹ In 1695 the duty at London was made 5s. per chaldron, and immediately the price of coal at Southwark was more than doubled.¹¹⁰ In the time of Anne and afterward statutes were repeatedly passed, followed by complaints of the heavy burden.¹¹¹ "Coals is a Thing of so absolute Necessity, that it is impossible to preserve the Poor from perishing without having the same at a moderate Price", runs a broadside written to oppose a duty.¹¹² Not the least of the discontent was due to the fact that at times the duty was less on coals exported to foreign parts, so that shipmasters could sell cheaper in Holland and France than in the port of London.¹¹³ In addition there were duties at London for metage or measuring and for the rebuilding of St. Paul's.¹¹⁴ On one occasion it was alleged that any further imposition would give great advantage to the Irish and the men of Hamburg, and carry trade away from England.¹¹⁵

More insistent were the complaints against the monopolists in London. As the hostmen of Newcastle got control of the export, so the woodmongers or wharfingers and the lightermen attempted to control the importation into London. In 1664 a report to the lord mayor and aldermen declared, "That the Citizens and Inhabitants of London, and Parts adjacent, do lie under an intollerable grievance . . . brought upon them by the Wood-mongers", who had tried to get into their hands the entire retail trade of the city. They had got possession of as many wharves as possible, and where they themselves could not use them, had let them with the understanding that they be not employed for the landing or selling of coals. It was said that they endeavored to compel the coal-ships to unload at their wharves, and by all means to prevent people dealing with the ships direct; that they tried to suppress others who dealt in the retailing of coals; and that by various devices they manipulated the supply and raised prices.¹¹⁶ In 1669 Prynne alludes to the excessive prices caused by a confederacy of woodmongers.¹¹⁷

¹⁰⁹ Dendy, *op. cit.*, p. xxxii.

¹¹⁰ 6 and 7 William and Mary c. 18; 9 William III. c. 13; *Commons' Journals*, XI. 390.

¹¹¹ For example, 6 Anne c. 50; 8 Anne c. 10; 9 Anne cc. 6, 27; 30 George II. c. 19, sect. 28; *Commons' Journals*, XVIII. 414, XXIII. 263.

¹¹² *Some Considerations Humbly offered to the Honourable House of Commons against Passing the Bill for laying a further Duty on Coals* (n. p., n. d.).

¹¹³ *An Enquiry into the Reasons of the Advance*, etc., p. 37.

¹¹⁴ 1 James II. c. 15; 9 Anne c. 27; *Commons' Journals*, X. 235.

¹¹⁵ *Reasons, Humbly Offered to the Honourable House of Commons, by the Dyers, against laying a further Duty upon Coals* (n. p., n. d.).

¹¹⁶ *Some Memorials of the Controversie with the Wood-Mongers, or Traders*

In process of time the woodmongers lost their power to the lightermen, who, at first employed by the woodmongers, presently began to furnish coal to purchasers direct.¹¹⁸ In 1700 they were incorporated as the Lightermen's Company of London,¹¹⁹ and acquired a certain monopoly. Previously all dealers might load and carry coals in their own lighters anywhere on the Thames, but the new company obtained exclusive privileges as to the use of lighters, and other dealers were debarred from employing them except to carry coals from the ships to their own wharves, with the result that they lost many of their customers, while the lightermen were able to engross the principal part of the trade.¹²⁰ Thus they came to be able to unload or retard a fleet of coal-ships, and so raise or lower the price as suited them.

In 1702 a committee of the Commons reported that several owners of collieries at Newcastle had made a contract with "the Body of Lightermen at London", by which the proprietors obliged themselves to pay to the lightermen 3d. per chaldron for all coals which the latter sold for them, while the lightermen agreed to pay these proprietors 6d. for each chaldron of other owners' coals sold before theirs was disposed of, whereupon the price was immediately raised at Newcastle.¹²¹ In 1729 numerous complaints from the trades of London brought to light agreements and combinations of lightermen and shipmasters to enhance the price, oppress the poor, and lessen the public revenue.¹²² In the next year shipmasters of Scarborough, Whitby, Newcastle, Sunderland, and Great Yarmouth, who were employed in carrying coal, sought relief from the oppressive conduct of the lightermen, and asked that the trade might be open.¹²³ The Lightermen's Company was now thoroughly investigated. Testimony was given to the effect that half of all the coal brought to London was bought by twelve lightermen, and the other half by about forty more. Few coals were sold to persons not of the company, since masters feared to have their ships marked, and then subjected to delays. Two or three lightermen each sold more

in Fuel, from the Year 1664 to this Time, as it lieth before a Committee of Common Council (1680), pp. 2-4.

¹¹⁷ *Brief Animadversions, etc.*, p. 183.

¹¹⁸ *The Case of the Watermen and Lightermen working on the River of Thames* (n. p., n. d.).

¹¹⁹ 11 William III. c. 21.

¹²⁰ *The Case of many Persons Keeping Wharfs, and Others, Dealing in Coals, in the Cities of London and Westminster, and the Parts Adjacent (1730?)*.

¹²¹ *Commons' Journals*, XIV. 19.

¹²² *Id.*, XXI. 345, 368, 369-373.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 465, 474.

than 30,000 chaldrons a year, eight or nine others about 20,000 each. Sixteen of the lightermen maintained a fund to prosecute persons who kept lighters and bought coals in London. Not only was the price advanced to consumers, but they had so put down the price paid to shipmasters that the coal-ships were run at a loss.¹²⁴ The Commons were resolved to bring this to an end, and so a statute was passed which declared that inasmuch as a monopoly in the coal trade had almost been created at London, thereafter dealers in coals might use their own lighters, and anyone attempting to act as an agent for a shipmaster should be heavily fined.¹²⁵ Thus the lighter-men's monopoly was brought to an end, while the shipmasters were given the freedom they had desired to dispose of their coals, and the price in London was made subject to the regulation of the local authorities.¹²⁶

Raising prices and restraint of trade were not the only abuses by those seeking profit from selling of coals. Mixing of different grades, false measure, and under-weight were constant evils. Abuse in the sale of coals was noticed in the House of Lords in 1605.¹²⁷ Some years later a paper addressed to the privy council complained of "the corrupt mixture of coales, and the foule abuse and deceit thereby".¹²⁸ At the end of the century Charles Povey, a merchant of London, gives his own account how, after adopting a device to unload ships directly at his own wharf, he was subjected to calumny and prosecution because he lowered the price, gave just measure, and refused to bribe officials. In 1700 he published a pamphlet in which he exposed the villainous practices of his time.¹²⁹ Next year he wrote again, explaining how the struggle to engross the trade had led to fraud, that prices were reduced below the point where profit could honestly be made, and then short measure given, so that twenty chaldrons were sold as twenty-three, twenty-four, or twenty-five. He declared that dealers undertook to deliver coals for only three shillings more than they paid for them, when they were at four shillings' expense. "The World is now come to that sad pass, that an Honest Man cannot Live; for if he gives to every one his due, he gains nothing; and if he does not

¹²⁴ *Commons Journals*, XXI. 517, 518.

¹²⁵ 3 George II. c. 26; also 4 George II. c. 30.

¹²⁶ *The Case of the Owners and Masters of Ships Employed in the Coal-Trade; an Enquiry into the Reasons of the Advance of the Price of Coals*, p. 8.

¹²⁷ *Lords' Journals*, II. 392.

¹²⁸ Add. MSS. 12496, f. 96 (1622).

¹²⁹ *A Discovery of Indirect Practices in the Coal-Trade, or a Detection of the pernicious Maxims and unfair Dealings of a certain Combination of Men, who affirm, It is a Cheat to be Just, and Just to Cheat*, etc. (London, 1700).

dispose of his Goods at the same Rate as others do, he shall have no Trade." Officials had long been employed to see that full measure was given, but there was private correspondence between the officers and dishonest dealers, so that these dealers were warned and protected, and the honest maligned and harassed.¹³⁰ That these measurers of coals were themselves subjected to troubles if they attempted to fulfil their duties honestly is affirmed by a complaint made in 1714. A faithful measurer was often removed from the inspection of a ship on complaint to his superior. "And after a Vatt is filled, the Ships' Crew will often sweep off great Quantities of Coals, and the Under-meter taking Notice thereof is often in danger of his Life for so doing."¹³¹

Many attempts were made to prevent the mixing of inferior coal with good, and then selling all as of the best quality, but various means were found to evade the regulations. It was asserted that when those who thus cheated their customers lost standing, they attempted to force honest dealers to imitate their conduct, and join in a combination with them, and that after a war of price-cutting they succeeded in doing this, after which prices were raised and the measure lessened.¹³² About the middle of the century it was said that where the inspection of the public meter was not feared, the fraud amounted to three bushels in the chaldron; though at the same time it was asserted that the dealers insisted on getting overweight from the lightermen: "It is notorious that Dealers have been hardy enough to complain, because the identical Coals, which they have bought of the Lightermen for Twenty-one, did not measure out Twenty-four Chaldrons."¹³³

The story of the laborers where coal was imported is a record of discontent and protest against oppression. Prior to Elizabethan times the unloading of coal-ships in the Thames belonged to the society of "Billingsgate Porters", freemen of London and well organized. In the course of time, however, as the trade greatly increased, the porters ceased to do the actual unloading and became occupied with other parts of the work, after which the unloading came to be done by the coal-heavers, not freemen and not governed by their own rulers.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Charles Povey, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-30, 31, 32, 40, 41.

¹³¹ *The Report and Order Thereupon, made concerning the Coal-Meters, and Their Deputies or Under-Meters* (London, 1714), p. 9.

¹³² *An Enquiry into the Reasons of the Advance*, etc., pp. 18-21.

¹³³ *Consideration on the Coal Trade, More particularly as it concerns the Consumers within the City and Liberty of Westminster*, etc. (1748?).

¹³⁴ *The Coal-Heavers Case* (1764?), p. 1.

In 1696 the coal-heavers complained of new impositions laid upon them by the lord mayor and the aldermen and refused to work. Investigation by the privy council showed that the authorities had "Erected a Fellowship or Fraternity" to unload the colliers, that only its members were to be allowed to do the work, at a certain rate of pay, from which 2d. per chaldron was to be deducted for hospitals and other uses. Both masters of ships and men were discontented at these restrictions, and work was stopped until the old conditions were restored by the lords justices.¹³⁵ In 1701 Povey noticed the mean condition to which the coal-heavers had been reduced, they receiving now 7s. where formerly they had 20s.; "and harder Labour there cannot be, for they work more like Gally-slaves than Free-men". As matters were, there was constant competition on the part of these laborers and underbidding, and he thought that the remedy lay in the government settling their wages.¹³⁶

In 1708 the coal-heavers petitioned the queen for a charter of incorporation, which was apparently granted.¹³⁷ But half a century after their condition seems to have improved little, for they complained to Parliament that a number of men called "Undertakers" had established a monopoly of supplying laborers to the masters of coal-ships, from whose rules and exactions they prayed relief. They asked that Parliament establish an office for supplying laborers and pass a law to regulate their wages, "that they might be enabled to make such Provision for such of them as may be sick, lame, and past their Labour, and for the Relief of their Widows and Orphans, as should be thought proper". A committee reported that the coal-heavers did hard work for wages which ranged from 1s. to 2s. 6d. per twenty chaldrons, the price of labor varying according to the number of ships in the river. Sometimes when wages were low and a great number of ships arrived, the laborers insisted on higher wages than they had contracted for, without which they would leave the ships which they had engaged to unload. It would be well for the trade if wages were regulated. The men, the report declared, worked in groups of fifteen, one of whom was called the "Market-Man". The undertakers agreed with the masters of the ships for unloading their coals, and then applied to the market-men, who furnished the laborers. There were twenty undertakers, of whom nineteen kept ale-houses in which the coal-heavers were obliged to spend part of their wages daily. Under one pretext or another

¹³⁵ St. P. Dom., William and Mary, VI., Aug. 11, 13, 1696.

¹³⁶ *The Unhappiness of England*, pp. 46-48.

¹³⁷ St. P. Dom., Entry Books, CVI., Sept. 14, 1708.

various deductions were made from the wages, which were not paid until the ship was cleared. Complaint was also made about a combination of the undertakers to compel the coal-heavers to obtain from them their shovels, which were furnished at a shilling a ship. The result was that in 1758 the coal-heavers secured a bill for their relief.¹³⁸ An office for the registering of workers was now erected, but the undertakers by intrigue and by threat sought to restrain the men from enrolling, so that later the office was closed for want of support.¹³⁹ "It can be proved", said a protest, "that all those who have paid into that Office, have punctually received One Shilling per Day when they have been ill, and in case of Death, they have been buried in a decent and Christian-like Manner."¹⁴⁰

Thus it is evident that in the English coal trade before the Industrial Revolution many of the practices which obtained afterward flourished in much the same way as later. Capitalists strove by various devices, particularly by combination, to destroy competition, monopolize markets, and fix prices as they desired. The greatest success came to those who seized the routes of transportation and terminal facilities for export and import. Against all such devices the government strove, after its traditional policy of supervising industry for the welfare of the nation, but it strove ineffectively and with decreasing success. The case of the laborers was harder, for trade unions were just feebly beginning. Then, as later, workmen had to endure long hours, low wages, dishonest dealing, and payment in truck. The lowly miners, keelmen, and coal-heavers could easily be oppressed. Frequently they protested, but they could accomplish little. Government attempted to intervene in their behalf, but it also forbade them to strike, and it broke up their combinations. The day of these laborers had not yet come. The eighteenth century was to bring them no amelioration, but in the nineteenth an enlightened public opinion would improve their condition while they and their fellows slowly got more and more control of the government itself, until the beginning of the twentieth was to find them more powerful than the capitalists who opposed them, and able, when they rose now, to shake the foundations of industrial society in their country.

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¹³⁸ 31 George II. c. 76; *Commons' Journals*, XXVIII. 73, 222, 259, 264, 265.

¹³⁹ *The Coal-Heavers Case*, pp. 2, 3; *The Case of the Coal-Heavers, Respecting the Behaviour of the Coal-Undertakers*, etc. (1769?), pp. 1, 2.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.